



McDougall's Good Stories For Children



THE MAGIC OINTMENT

An Old Cobbler's Marvelous
Tale of How He Became
Sultan of Turkey and Took
a Trip to the Moon

SANDY MacTAVISH, the old Scotch cobbler, who has often mended my shoes, used to tell me the most amusing stories about his past; stories so filled with wonders that my eyes used to bulge as I listened. As I grew older I came to think that all was not exactly true in these tales, and when I was grown up he stopped telling them to me. In time I almost forgot them, but one rainy day I took shelter in his little dusty shop, where Wilfred Hayes was waiting for the old shoemaker to finish pegging a sole on a much-worn shoe, and then I heard, like a voice in the distant past, the very same tale, only Sandy MacTavish told it somewhat differently.

"You'll not be wanting to listen to this story," he said to me, "for I mind having told it to you long ago, but this laddie never heard it. I was just relating to him about how I came to be the Sultan o' Turkey. Do you recall that?"

"I'd like to hear it again," said I. "I can't exactly remember how it ended."

"It ended," continued the shoemaker, "by my coming to America and becoming a cobbler! It was all caused by a little china jar of magic ointment or salve."

"Oh, please hurry and tell me all about it," cried Wilfred, eagerly.

"Don't be in a hurry! Faith, a good tale is soon spoiled by overhaste in the telling. I was a poor boy, and my uncle, Donald MacCallum-More, raised me. It's little enough we had to eat either of us, but our house was warm and dry, and that's something."

"My uncle was named Owen Cameron, of Kircaldy, and he was in his youth a servant of the great wizard Rhodanmanthus. When the wizard died Owen found among his things this little china jar filled with ointment, same as you might use on a sore, and with it was a paper all covered with mystic signs and writing that said it was magic ointment, and by merely greasing your palm with it one might have any wish in the world granted."

"Now, Owen was a strict Presbyterian, and it's mighty little dealing would he have with witchcraft or sorcery; besides, in those days they burnt people for that same thing."

"Well, he died and left this jar to my uncle, Donald MacCallum-More, and you may be sure, after all he'd heard about it he never even touched it; and now I wish that I never had, either. But, after all, perhaps it was worth while to have all the wonderful adventures and experiences that have come to me, even if the end of them all was cobbling for a living."

"I was but a laddie then, and I feared nothing but a stick in the hands of the schoolmaster."

"When I was about twelve years old my uncle died, and much to my amazement and sorrow, I found that he owed Mr. Simon Gillieudsy so much money that he seized the old house as payment, throwing me out on the cold, bleak moor in the dead of winter. I went to the schoolmaster and asked him to let me sleep in the school, but now that no more money was coming from my uncle, he turned a cold shoulder on me and told me to sleep among the rocks."

"Now, all that I had in the world, aside from the scanty clothes on my back, was that tiny china jar; and sitting there among the rocks I thought of it, and remembered what Uncle Donald had said about its magical qualities."

"Faith," said I, "if it's magic I'll soon find out whether it's any good!" Then I remembered that my uncle had often recalled his own uncle's words when speaking of the ointment, for he had said that the wizard's writing gave full warning to all users of the jar that the ointment was ten thousand years old and didn't always work as it should. Its magic virtue seemed to wane and fade away at the most unexpected times and leave the user in the lurch."

"Well," said I to myself, "if it works, all right; and if it doesn't, then it's small loss to Sandy MacTavish! I'll try a bit and see!"

"So, without more words I rubbed some of it on my palm good and hard, and then says I:

"I wish the schoolmaster would grow fast to the outside of the schoolhouse door by his long nose!"

"The next minute I heard an awful yell, and, looking up, saw the schoolmaster fast to the door! I could hardly believe my own eyes, but when I got there, sure enough, he was hard and fast, as if planted in the oak wood!"

"The magic's in the ointment all right!" says I, and then I wished the old rascal off the door, and he was free in a jiffy! He glared at me and ran into the house."

"I started to walk to Glasgow, but after I'd gone about a mile I says, 'Why not ride?' and then I used the jar again, wishing for a coach and horses, with a driver and a footman. Right beside me in the road stood my turnout before I could look around, and I jumped in, telling my man to drive to the best hotel in Glasgow, The Red Goat, as it was called."

"I was as welcome as the flowers in May when I drove up in that fine coach, and the landlord came down to help me out; but I'd forgotten to wish for fine clothes to go with my carriage, and he grew red in the face when he saw me."

"What tramp have we here?" he cried. "Is this your master?" he asked of my driver, who instantly replied that I was, and then the landlord was puzzled."

"Have you some rooms for me?" I asked. Then I ordered him to conduct me to them at once, for I was in disguise, as the Scandinavians were after me. He led me to the finest rooms in the hotel, and then asked my name. I didn't dare tell him I was



MacTavish, so, says I, with a grand air, "I am his Highness the Prince of Rooshy, and I am desirous of remaining very secluded until after the Czar, my father, sends me word that it's safe to go abroad here."

"Well, then you should have seen him bow almost to the carpet before Sandy! When he had departed I quickly wished myself clothes and bags of gold in plenty against the time he came back, so that he was quite sure before night that I really was the Czar's son, for Russians were scarce in Scotland in those days."

"Next day I bought a grand marble monument and sent it back home for Uncle Donald's grave, and it's there to this day! I've always noticed that what I did for others always lasted, although it's little profit, aside from experience, that I ever got!"

"Well, all the beautiful young ladies in Glasgow began to make eyes at me and write me love letters; for, you see, they all wanted to be Roosian princesses! And soon I was all engaged and promised to one of them whose father was the biggest cork merchant there."

"Everything was going along like a flock of Muscovy ducks on a pond when the crash came. Faith, 'twas no crash, either; just a silent oozing away of all my good luck! I made one wish too many and slipped up!"

"I had bags and more bags and more than that, of gold and silver, but instead of walking quietly to the jeweler's and buying all that I wanted for Miss Betsy Ferguson, the young lady I was telling you about, what did I do but grease my palm and wish for, first, a string of diamonds as big as hickory nuts, bracelets of sapphires and a gold watch all covered with green emeralds; but nothing came!"

"I looked all about the room, but they didn't show up. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered the wizard's warning, and I almost fainted when I saw that all my fine clothes, my bag of gold, and even my love letters had vanished in the wink of an eye!"

"Then the landlord came in, and, seeing a ragged lad standing there, he seized me, called me a sneak-thief who was trying to steal from the prince, and in a jiffy they had me clapped in jail. Then they began to look for the Roosian prince, and soon they charged me with murdering him and concealing his body; but that didn't explain where his horses, carriages and servants had gone."

"Then the landlord said that I must be one of the Scandinavians whom the prince had so feared, and so I was sent in chains to London, where the King had me brought before him to learn what the Scandinavians wanted with the Roosian prince, his half-cousin. The more I explained the less they listened, and finally they sent me back to jail."

"Six months I laid there in prison, and every day I bewailed my ill luck, but never thought of trying the magic ointment at all! One day an awful storm was howling outside, and my cell was bitter cold within, and I was huddled up in rags trying to get warm when I thought of it; and, taking the jar out, I rubbed some of the stuff on my palm to see if it was still as greasy and slippery as ever, but never hoping it would be of any use. Then when a blast of wind came that seemed to rock the prison, I said: 'I wish it would blow the old roof off and carry me back to London!'"

"I found myself in a street unknown to me, with crowds of people hurrying past, and from the way they all acted when I stopped them to ask questions I knew I was in London. Nobody had any time for a ragged boy. Finally, seeing a gilt coach pass by, I asked a small boy to tell me who owned it, and he told me it belonged to the Prime Minister."

"I thought I would go see the Prime Minister and get him to assist me. But I couldn't get to him, no matter how hard I tried. Finally the doorkeeper got tired of my persistence and said: 'You go and see the Sultan of Turkey, sonny. Perhaps he'll talk to you.'"

"I knew that if I could bribe the doorkeeper I could see the Prime Minister, but I had nothing except the little jar. I took it out and offered it to him, and when he asked what it was I told him. He said: 'Let's see you try it. If it's magic I'll let you in.'"

"Of course, I never expected it would work, but I rubbed my palm with the grease and said: 'I wish I were the Sultan of Turkey.'"

They Were Chased by the Moon-Calf

"In an instant I was wafted across old Europe and was sitting on the Divan of Turkey. That's what they call it there, although in England it's the Throne. I was smoking a hookah, or nargilleh, as they call the water-pipes there, and smoked finer tobacco than I ever have since, let me tell you! Around me were many noble-looking men with jeweled turbans on their heads, and every fifteen minutes they would bow down to the carpet and say: 'Hail, Ali Bazam, Sultan of Turkey and son of the Prophet!' If any of them neglected to do it, off went their head! But none of them forgot it. The Grand Vizier, whose name was Kawn Bifhasch, came to get my orders for the day, and when I told him to bring before me all the clever boys in order to make them captains in the guard, he almost fell over in amazement."

"Then I went to inspect some new crown jewels. You know the Sultan gets a new set of jewels every week, and puts the old ones in chests in the garret of the palace. I used to go up there and play with them sometimes when I had a chance to be by myself, although that wasn't very often, for I was guarded strictly all the time, for there's nobody, I guess, in all the world, who is so constantly in danger of being shot, or blown up by a bomb, or poisoned, as the poor Sultan. Every dish had to be tasted before I touched it, and the worst of it was that my relations, of which I had plenty, were the ones who were to be dreaded, for each of them wished to occupy the Turkish Divan and smoke that jeweled nargilleh."

"Then, too, I had to order a few of my seven hundred wives to go back into the country because they were suspected of wanting another Sultan. Half of my time was spent in getting acquainted with my sons and daughters, of which there were three thousand, and you may imagine what a job that was!"

"Worse than trying to remember the name of every boy in school!" cried Wilfred.

"No, that's far worse; for, after all, these all had the same last name," said Sandy. "I forget what it was, but it belonged to all of them."

"You said it was Ali Bazam," interrupted the boy.

"Oh, yes; that was it. Well, I was saying that I had little time for fun, except camel riding. I enjoyed that. And sometimes elephants. At night I would steal up and play with the crown jewels, and once I took about two bushels and hid them in a hole I dug in the back garden of the palace. I've often wished that I had money enough to go back to Turkey, and dig them up. I'd be rich then. I'll bet I could find the place in the dark. However, there's no use wishing, now that the jar is gone."

"Where did it go?" asked Wilfred.

"I'm going to tell you. One night I went up to the garret and there I found old Antisepticus, the Court Astronomer, looking up at the sky. He told me that he was moon-gazing, and said, with a deep sigh, that he wished that he were able to visit that planet just once before he died, so as to be competent to state whether it was really made of green cheese or not. Of course, being well educated, I could have told him all about it, but I was now getting pretty tired of being Sultan, for it's not what it's cracked up to be, by any means, and so I said: 'Well, if you really want to go to the moon, perhaps we might fix it! You see, I hadn't made a wish since I became Sultan, and I was pretty sure the power was in the ointment, all right.'"

"The Court Astronomer smiled a sort of malicious smile, and replied: 'It were well that your Majesty himself might take such a journey just at this time!'"

"And why should I take it, except for the pleasure of the trip?" I asked him.

"Because the poor people are clamoring for a

new Sultan, and the Royal Guards are even at this moment considering who shall be their choice and debating whether to drown you or simply cut off your head!"

"But I've been the very best Sultan they ever had!" I cried. "Haven't I kissed all the babies and everybody? Haven't I kissed all the babies and coddled all the old folks? Haven't I cheapened everything in the land and taken from the rich to give to the poor? Given away coal and wood and smoking tobacco? Why should they want to drown me, when they can drown any number of my wives? Didn't I get up a lottery for the public where everybody got a prize? Who ordered the bakers to put more raisins in the cake, and the popcorn men to give larger popcorn balls for five cents? It was I, Ali Bazam! And now you say that some of them want to fire me out!"

"All of them seem to wish to depose you!" declared the Court Astronomer. "I hear it everywhere!"

"Then why didn't you come and tell me before, I demanded."

"Why, that's none of my business! I am hired to study the stars and decipher the meaning of their messages, not to help you run the country, my dear Sultan. Beside, I forgot all about it until this very minute," said the Astronomer.

"And do you, too, think that I ought to be drowned?" I asked.

"Oh, no; I think you've been about the best ruler we've had since Abdul Aziz, who lived nine hundred years ago. The fact is, you've made yourself common. The people want a Sultan who is never seen on the street, and who lives in stately solitude; not a kind-hearted man who tries to help them enjoy life; and so they consider you a failure. I don't blame you, but you do not understand this Sultan business at all!" continued the Astronomer. "They really want a man who makes them fall flat in the mud when he rides past on his elephant, and who makes them pay taxes and shows them that he's the real thing. See?"

"All right!" I cried. "I'll fix them! I'll let them see what kind of a ruler I am!"

"It's really too late now," said Antisepticus. "They're going to behead you in the morning!"

"Not much they ain't!" I declared, and I rubbed some of the ointment on my palm. Then I said: 'I wish we were on the moon.'"

"Well, there we were, standing on the side of a crater so deep that you could put this whole State right into it and lose it."

"We hadn't been there three minutes before the Court Astronomer began to cry bitterly, shedding so many tears that he had to unwind his turban and use it for a handkerchief, and when I asked for an explanation he said it was from disappointment at

finding the moon a dead one. Nothing but dry, cold rocks, not even a little bush, and the temperature was simply dreadful. I was almost frozen in a quarter of an hour, and all the time the moon growing smaller and smaller, as it was an old moon, almost at its finish. I saw that pretty soon there wouldn't be space enough left for standing-room, but just then we had something else to talk about."

"Out from the dark crater came an awful shape! It was like an immense caterpillar-crawling up, but its eyes were fiery and its mouth showed tremendous teeth."

"The Astronomer shouted: 'It's a moon-calf! And an angry one, too! Run, sire, for your life, or else she'll have Sultan for supper!'"

"You bet I fled, but as I ran I made a quick wish to be back again on earth. I shot away from the moon like a bullet, and landed here in America, where I'd never been before, right here in this town, and then I remembered the Court Astronomer!"

"Instantly greasing my palm, for the ointment was all scraped off by striking the earth rather hard, I wished that he might be with me; but, alas! again the magic had oozed out of the jar! Whether the poor man was devoured by the tremendous moon-calf or not I never was able to learn, although I've often spent a dime looking at the moon through a telescope to see if I could discover any trace of him."

"Here I was, all dressed up in the Sultan's rich and costly clothes, shining with jewels and the gorgeous badges given to me by other kings, but without a cent in my pockets. People thought I belonged to some circus or show; just come to town when they crowded about me, and you can be sure I was mighty glad to hear them all speaking English."

"When I explained to a nice-looking fellow where I had come from, he said he was sorry for me, and he'd take me to his room and lend me some clothes to wear instead of those outlandish things I had on, but after I'd changed my clothes the rascal ran off with mine, jewels and all! Wasn't he a scoundrel?"

"So, finding that everybody has to work here, even an ex-Sultan, I opened this shoemaking shop, and here I am yet."

"What became of the jar?" asked Wilfred.

"Must have dropped it when I fell, or perhaps it was in my clothes when the rascal ran away with 'em. All I wish is that he'll try the ointment some time by mistake for cold cream and make a fool wish, that's all! I'm sure something like that will happen to such a villain!"

"Ceci," echoed Wilfred. "I wish I could find that jar. What was it like?"

"Just a plain, white, china jar, like they use for salve in the drug-store. Perhaps you might find it, but it's unlikely. Pigs might fly," added Sandy, smiling, "but they're poor birds to gather feathers from!"

"When Wilfred told this story to his father, and asked him whether he thought such another jar might exist, Mr. Hayes smiled and replied with a funny look: 'I've heard Sandy tell about that jar ever since I was a baby, and each time it was another story. I think all the moon he ever used is in that tongue of his, my boy!'"

WALT McDOUGALL.